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ABSTRACT

Advice, activities, and techniques for getting the first days and weeks of school off to a smooth start are offered in this compilation of six articles taken from issues of "Instructor" (Aug.-Sep. 1976, Aug. 1980, Aug. 1982, Aug. 1983), "Learning" (Sept. 1982), and "Teacher" (Sept. 1979), magazines. Suggestions for class management and organization are given as well as ideas for fun activities to welcome the students and help them get acquainted. Several articles contain back-to-school or first-day-of-school checklists. One article is devoted to ideas for celebrating special events or special days in the month of September. (JH)

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[BACK TO SCHOOL ACTIVITIES FOR THE ELEMENTARY TEACHER. COMPILED FROM SIX ISSUES OF "INSTRUCTOR," "LEARNING," AND "TEACHER" MAGAZINES.]

Compiled by

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Good BEGINNINGS

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Pamela Lawson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

For openers...

- Ready your room. Are pictures, plants, and pillows in place? Have you hung at least one great poster that's sure to please your kids?
- Survey your kingdom. Do you have a working pencil sharpener, chalk, erasers, manuscript letter cards, different kinds of paper in quantity, a flag, magic markers, paper clips, tape, and staples?
- Prepare your schedule. Is it large and in a place where it can be seen easily?
- Don't be caught list-less. Have you made extra copies of class and faculty rosters to keep at home?
- Seek comfort. Do you have an extra pair of old shoes in your classroom? An extra sweater, too?
- Tell others what you need. Have you asked students, parents, and friends to start saving materials for your projects?
- Know thy library. Have you checked what kinds of paintings, records, magazines, books, and films are available?
- Take care. Have you had a physical checkup? Do you follow guidelines for proper nutrition, rest, and exercise?

Genevieve Bylinowski

Gear up means cheer up

Get personal

Faculty back-to-school workshops are like family reunions at some schools, like business meetings at others. If you are in charge of any workshop activities, try this informal way of "getting personal." Have teachers, secretaries, cooks, aides, custodians, and principals fill out a questionnaire that has these categories: Full Name; Name You Wish to Be Called; Housemates; Favorite House Activities; Worst Chore; Spare Time Activities; Favorite Snack; Favorite Sports; Vacation Spot; Magazine Subscriptions; Alternative Career Choice; One Wish.

Display the completed questionnaires on a bulletin board and listen to the conversations start. **Robert Ziegler**

Find an excuse

You'll probably collect your first excuse the very first day of school. Start collecting them now and by the end of the year you may have the makings of a book called *That's Inexcusable*.

Here are a few excuses I've received: "We thought our ten-year-old had a cold, but it turned out to be a smoker's cough." "He had an abbess on his knee which made it hard for him to walk." "She thinks she got Egyptian flu from her mummy." "Harry was vaccinated against rabbis and he was afraid the boys would punch him in his sore arm." "Dear School: Please excuse Darla. She'll be out of school on Aug. 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33."

Charles V. Mathis

The start of something big

Recognize how important the first day is and acknowledge how important your kids are to you with these fun activities.

Sign in please. Some time during the first day when things have quieted down, set aside a time for each child to "sign in" by writing his or her signature on a long piece of white paper. Tell children to write big. When they come to class the next day, they'll see the signature list posted outside the door. They'll know they are full-fledged, signed-up members of their class.

A *tube to remember.* Save empty rolls from toilet tissue for your first day's time-capsule event. In this tube, children should place a record of themselves at this day and time. A strand of hair, a length of string that is their exact height, a piece of paper with biographical data, a handwriting sample—any of these items might fit inside. Close both sides of the tubes with construction-paper lids and save for the end of the school year. Kids will love to remember themselves as they were and note how they've changed during the year.

Valerie Bang-Jensen

Apple-picking time. Display an apple tree outside your classroom with big, red apple name tags attached. Beside the tree place a poem:

Welcome back—
come on in!
Now you're here.
We can begin.
I'm so glad that
you've arrived.
"Pick" your name
and come inside.

As each child hands the name tag to you, help him or her pin it on and note the varied reactions. It's a great way to associate names with faces and personalities. **Kathy C. Barber**

Jokes only a kid could love

What's up, Duck? Do you know any duck jokes? How about monster jokes? Try out these kid-pleasers the first day and then ask your kids to make up some more in the same style.

What kind of music do jazzy ducks play? *Ducksyland.*

In what country do babies burp the most? *Belchum.*

What color is a shout? *Yell-oh.*

What color is a hiccup? *Burple.*

For more jokes like the above, see *What's Up, Duck?* by Michael C. Thaler. Copyright© 1978 by Michael C. Thaler. Used by permission of Franklin Watts, Inc.

Now try these if your kids enjoy monster madness.

Why don't vampires get kissed a lot? *Because they have bat breath.*

What do you call an extra-long monster football game? *Ogre time.*

Where do ghouls go after junior high? *Highs ghoul.*

What do you call an overweight vampire? *A fat bat.*

Jokes by Mike Thaler, America's Riddle King, from *Scared Silly* published by Avon Books. Copyright © 1982 by Mike Thaler. Used by permission of Curtis Brown, Ltd.

Unravel a story

Dig deep in your pockets and pull out a comb, two pens, a plastic bottle cap, some flower seeds, a miniature toy, and whatever other little objects you care to stash there. "What is the teacher doing with all these gadgets?" your kids will ask. Don't tell them until you ask them to empty their pockets, too. When desk tops are full, explain that you are starting a group story. It's a first-day activity that's sure to get all your students involved.

The class should first discuss the type of story it will tell—whether comedy, science fiction, mystery, fantasy, or horror. Then characters must be chosen, but not too many. (Volunteers may add a detail to a character's personality. Call on a shy child to name one of the characters.)

When the cast is complete, choose a setting. The plot will unfold naturally. Simply ask each student to develop the story line around one of the items from his or her pocket. It's your job to keep the story moving and to see that one student doesn't make up the entire plot. Be sure to focus the story on the items. If note pads are included in your assortment, pass the pad to a student and ask him or her to tell you what a character read on it. Suddenly you'll see blank paper become a grocery list, a love letter, or a treasure map.

Set a time limit for this activity, or the enthusiasm of your students could turn a short story into another Great American Novel. Selecting a title is a good way to end.

Your students will so enjoy this activity that in a week when you suggest a "pocket mystery" as a writing activity, they'll react enthusiastically. This time have all students write about the same assortment. Then compare the stories.

Nelson J. Garifi

Take along a teddy bear

Kids often fear the unfamiliar turf they face at the beginning of a school year. I always tell them to "take along a teddy bear." My motto is based on a story I used to read to my first graders—*Ira Sleeps Over*, by Bernard Waber (Houghton Mifflin, 1972). When transferred to fifth grade, I found that story applied to youngsters facing the ominous middle-school first day, too.

Here's a summary of the story: Ira, a six-year-old, is invited to sleep over at his friend Reggie's house, but is not sure his teddy bear, Tah-Tah, is invited, too. Afraid of leaving Tah-Tah behind, Ira is also afraid of looking babyish. Is he so afraid that he decides to stay home? No. He makes the brave decision and goes without Tah-Tah. After an evening of ghost stories and pillow fights, it's time for bed and time to discover Reggie has a teddy bear, too.

Fifth graders understand the symbolic meaning of this story and enjoy discussing what kinds of "teddy bears" are suitable for kids their age. From lucky hats to big smiles to old friends—they suggest things they can take along to help themselves feel comfortable in strange settings.

Betty L. Forney

Post all signs; make messages matter

In the early days of school, posting a door sign each day will give your students a reason to read. By September you'll already note how more observant and interested kids will be in coming into their classroom.

What should the signs say? Just about anything, but try greetings: "Welcome back from vacation." "Happy Birthday, Mary. How will we celebrate?" Requests: "Look in the hamster cage to see a surprise." "Get a book from the library shelf before you sit down." Preference question: "Who do you think will win the Pittsburgh-Cleveland game tonight?" "Draw your favorite shape below." Study-related question: "Have you ever been to Mexico?" Feeling question: "How does all this rain make you feel?"

You might want to use your signs to introduce concepts you will be working on later in the day.

Make your message ask for some interaction on the part of students. Occasionally, offer a place to respond in writing on the sign itself or on the chalkboard. Allow children to respond when they are on their way to and from the room or when independent seat work is in progress.

To make the sign of the day even more effective, call attention to it once in the morning and once in the afternoon. After two weeks of signs, evaluate which ones drew the most and which the least response to give yourself an idea about how your signs are working.

Jane Bluestein

For openers...

Mrs. Cucumber's first time out

At 6:30 A.M. I wasn't feeling at all nervous about my new first-grade teaching assignment. Luckily I realized in time that the vitamins I popped into my mouth were really my pearl earrings.

Things got confusing when I got to school and introduced myself to my class. Small children have a hard time remembering "Newcomer" and often call me Mrs. Newcumber. Aimee was different. She immediately started calling me Mrs. Cucumber. Leonard then told me without so much as a twinkle in his eye that his brother Walter had seen me in his salad last night.

I had some problem with *their* names, too. William Petrie III didn't answer even though I pronounced Petrie three different ways. When I asked whose name I didn't call, a small voice said, "Me, teacher, my name is Billy."

At 9:35 the teacher needed a recess. Wesley led the way to the drinking fountain, but unfortunately it was broken. Lisa turned the handle several times before she asked, "Who drank all the water?"

Mandy was really surprised to see me jumping rope. She could hardly contain herself as she shouted, "Mrs. Cucumber, you can still do it!"

At 10 o'clock I took on the challenge of a penmanship lesson. I told Connie that I needed to see her write her name without a model; only I guess I really said, "Write your name without looking," because she made a perfect "C" with her eyes closed before I realized what she was doing.

By 10:30 we were well into language arts. Here are some of the new "old sayings" we came up with: "Don't count your chickens, they will bite you." "Eat, drink, and do the dishes." "Children should be seen and not spanked."

Primary social studies revolves around the "family." By 11 o'clock I already knew too much! Kelsey reported: "I'm going to get a sister. My mom is getting pregnant." Kim questioned him, "How do you know it's a girl?" Kelsey answered, "You can tell if it has long hair."

Schoolwork can be difficult. By 12 o'clock John complained, "I won't get caught up in a million years. I'll be ten million and six!"

The afternoon seemed to fly by. We barely finished our cooking project that produced cherry tarts when we had to hurry right into our dental health unit. Luckily I hushed up Nicole, whispering to her that she could brush her teeth as soon as she got home, for heaven's sake. Nicole was allowed to help sort 13 E.T. lunchpails while I tried to remember who went where when the dismissal bell rang.

I knew our 2 o'clock economics talk hadn't been wasted when at 3:05 Tim peeked in to see me tearing down the reading group lists that had to be completely revised, and said, "What is the matter, Mrs. Newcumber, you goin' out of business?"

By 4 P.M. I was on my way home when I passed the bus stop and noticed a mother anxiously watching her five-year-old hobbling out of the bus on one foot. "Henry," she asked, "did you hurt your foot?" "No, mommy, the bus driver gave us a long talk and told us to be sure to get off on the right foot!"

Luckily, one of us did.

Jonnie Newcomer

Advice for a well-rounded year

Reduce disorganization at the beginning of the year, and the rest of the year will go more smoothly. Here's how.

Observe the social interactions among students. Your seating plan and your groupings will benefit as a result. After a few weeks, ask children privately to choose the seatmate who would most enable them to do their best schoolwork. It's surprising how conscientiously children will choose.

Review all written work carefully. In the first weeks of school, thoroughly inspect all papers for assessment information. If a paper is messy, don't jump to the conclusion that carelessness caused the condition. Sloppiness may indicate stress, frustration, or difficulty in writing. Critical examination of written work also will help you decide what represents a student's best effort. Then you will be able to set a standard of expectation based on the ability of each child.

Look over your lesson plans each week. Ask yourself whether each assignment fits in with your overall objectives.

Set up an informal time at the end of the day to review each child's behavior and special efforts. This isn't a time to reprimand, punish, or embarrass. If a child has had a bad day, make a factual statement of the problem and give an optimistic note of encouragement. Always praise good efforts, even when the results fall short. This is a good time for children to suggest ways to improve themselves but still be able to leave for home with a good feeling.

No matter how tired you feel at the end of the day, take a few minutes to set up routine seat work for the first thing next morning. Beginning each day with a paper-and-pencil activity sets the tone for the day and has a calming effect on children. When you're ready to have your first lesson, your kids will be, too.

Linda B. Waters

Please don't disturb,

Elementary teachers have more daily disruptions than any other professionals. And first days are beset with more classroom disruptions than any other day. So what do you do when in the middle of class a child starts to cry, another gets sick, and you catch your earring or tie in your drawer?

Children leave or return from special classes. This is the most common disruption of them all and one of the most frazzling, especially if you have no single block of time when all the children are together. At the beginning of the school year, discuss the schedule and procedure for special classes with the special education teachers and your principal. Perhaps special classes for children in first, second, and third grades could be held in the morning; those for fourth, fifth, and sixth grades in the afternoon. If your school has

Tips for a brighter beginning...

Clip to the inside of your plan book the names of children who have hearing or vision problems, are left-handed, or are taking medication. In the confusion of a new year, this type of information often gets overlooked, and such children might need reassurance, special seating, or other help.

Plan the day so that intense subjects are followed by a reinforcing activity, recess, or free time. Cue students at least ten minutes before an activity change. To smooth the transition, let them know what will be expected from them.

Post class rules in a visible place so all know what is expected. Don't overwhelm the students with dozens of rules; choose just a few. When reprimanding a rule-breaker, refer the child to the chart, saying, "Would you please read rule No. 3."

Set up clear and consistent consequences. This eliminates accusations of unfairness and favoritism. Set positive consequences, too. We all need that paycheck when we've worked hard.

Use informal assessments to evaluate students' skills in reading, math, and spelling. Children won't learn if the material is beyond them. Have plenty of seat work ready for other children while you spend time with each individual. Use your assessment results for grouping purposes.

Set up a weekly job chart. Children can be chosen randomly to be board washer, pencil sharpener, and plant waterer. Make the continuation of the job contingent on satisfactory behavior. Assign a new job supervisor each week, too—someone who will check that the work is done according to the class-set standards. Giving each student a chance to supervise helps all the children understand the position of authority—how important it is to be clear and to balance demands with understanding.

Linda B. Waters

disrupt, bother, interrupt...

no policy on this matter, establish a check-out, check-in procedure with your class and ask kids to leave and return as quietly as possible.

Noises in class. Interrupt the din by creating a distraction of your own. Turn off the lights, or lower your voice. Wait for polite behavior and tell the class the waiting time will be deducted from recess time.

Student begins to cry. A very young child should be encouraged to express his or her feelings in words, if possible. Barring that, a hug coupled with a distraction will help. You'll need to listen to older children in private. Your acting as a sounding board will help them to relax and become self-directing.

Student uses obscene language. Gently but firmly inform kids that they may not use such language in school. For young children, suggest some creative but equally satisfying substitutes like, "Oh, elephant toenails!" or "Horseshoes!" Appeal to the intellects of older children. Inform them that it takes brains to express yourself with more than obscenities.

Impromptu parent conferences. Unless the parent can be brief, and the actual concern cannot wait, arrange a time for a conference later. Explain that then you will be better able to give your full attention, without interruption, to the matter at hand.

Spill occurs. While spilling taxes the patience of most adults, children, who've been spilling most of their short lives, are sympathetic to spills. If a large glass object has shattered, move the group away from area, and call maintenance. If spill is minor, clean up the mess; let child assist.

Mary Beth Spann Cicio

There's gotta be a first time

O.K. The desks are arranged. Your blinds are even, your pencils sharp. In just a few days your students will be coming through the door. As a beginning teacher, you're feeling every emotion from panic to hysteria to total confidence because you've never done this before.

Relax. Here's advice for you, the rookie teacher.

1. Begin the year by keeping things simple and highly structured. The environment, organization, and expectations of the first few weeks will not necessarily reflect what will be happening in the room later in the year. Making choices will be easier for students later if you set up a framework of familiarity.
2. Know your needs and limitations. Be aware of what behaviors you will and will not tolerate in the classroom. Think through strategies and responses. Commit yourself to being consistent.
3. Be an adult. You have a whole year to help kids develop self-management skills, but you won't be much help unless they perceive you as "together" and "in charge."
4. Respond to incidents calmly and firmly. Avoid overreacting. Avoid the temptation to talk an incident to death.
5. Overplan! Account for every minute of the school day in your plans. Keep students busy. Vary the activities in terms of types and degrees of student participation.
6. Have materials prepared. Try to anticipate where the students will be for each activity, how you will get them there, what they will need, and how long it will take. Think through the directions for each activity and have some contingency plans in case something goes awry.
7. Devote some energy to maintaining flexibility and a sense of humor. First days can get a little crazy at times.
8. Have a good time out there!

Jane Bluestein

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HOW TO CELEBRATE THE FIRST MONTH OF SCHOOL

A potpourri of events, ideas, and activities to make September special

by Sandra Nye

For those of us involved with school, September marks our annual opportunity for a new beginning. As teachers, we approach the opening day with renewed energy, a strengthened sense of commitment, and a resolve to try to strike the proper balance between the various ingredients of learning, blending them into a mixture that is both tasty and nourishing. When the children arrive—with excitement and some apprehension—most bring with them a desire to please and to do things right. Together we meet on that first day in our shared hope.

One of the challenges of September is to keep that hope alive—even after the excitement has faded and some of our carefully prepared concoctions prove indigestible. Our challenge is to meet our children on the edges of their understandings and to move with them from there, continually giving them opportunities to make their own fresh beginnings.

Among the prominent people who share September "beginnings" are Jane Addams, Grandma Moses, O. Henry, Jesse Owens, H. G. Wells, Michael Faraday, George Gershwin, Johnny Appleseed and Confucius. Events of historical significance that have anniversaries this month include several discoveries: Balboa claimed the Pacific Ocean for Spain in September 1513; Juan Cabrillo entered San Diego Bay and thus discovered California on September 28, 1542; and Henry Hudson, in September 1609, sailed into the river that now bears his name.

It was in this month that the Pilgrims began their voyage from England, on September 16, 1620. Nearly 250 years later, Abraham Lincoln issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation (September 22, 1862), which stated that all persons held as slaves "shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free."

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Other September dates commemorate record-breaking culinary achievements. The world's largest Popsicle—weighing 5,750 pounds—was made in Davenport, Iowa, on September 7, 1975; in Australia, on September 24 of that same year, the world's biggest hamburger was exhibited—2,859 pounds of beef formed into a patty over 27 feet in circumference—a record just broken this year. (You might ask your class to consider some of the problems involved in the preparation of such gigantic foods, then have them think of possible solutions.)

Several records of physical endurance were also set this month. In Albuquerque, N.M., on September 18, 1976, Jesse Castañeda walked 142 miles and 448 yards in 24 hours. On September 28, 1963, Giuseppe Cantarella of Italy set a world speed record on roller skates, skating 25.78 miles per hour. Your students might like to write arithmetic story problems based on these events.

September marks both the official and the unofficial ending of summer. Unofficially, the season ends with Labor Day, a holiday honoring American workers. Autumn officially begins at 3:46 a.m. EST on September 23. The month also holds two well-known Jewish holidays this year: Rosh Hashanah, the beginning of the Jewish New Year, falls on September 17; and Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement, occurs on September 26.

Events and Activities

September 11: In 1971, Penny, a Rhode Island Red owned by Treena White of England, laid seven eggs. Many children may not recognize Penny's feat as unusual. Can anyone in your class explain the normal laying habits of chickens? This might be a good time to initiate an investigation into the kinds of foods that come from farm animals, and how those foods get from the farm to the consumer. Have students make posters

WHAT'S SPECIAL

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of their findings, tracing the farm-to-supermarket path.

September 12: The first Sunday following Labor Day is Grandparents Day.

Discuss with children the reasons why this holiday was created. Talk about ways young people can show appreciation for grandparents and other older people who are important to them. What are some good activities children and older people can do together?

Have older students work in small groups to figure out this problem: If a generation is 30 years, and if you could invite to a family reunion all of your ancestors (parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, etc.) from the time the Pilgrims landed in 1620 to the present, how many people would you have to invite?

Have the groups compare their answers and their methods for getting the answers. If the students enjoy the activity, look for a copy of *My Backyard History Book* by David Weitzman (Little, Brown, 1975) for related ideas and projects.

September 14: In 1752, Great Britain adopted the Gregorian calendar.

Because the Julian calendar, which the Britons had been using prior to the Gregorian changeover, was 11 days off, Parliament ruled that the day following September 2 would be September 14. The ruling caused an uproar among the British people, who felt cheated of 11 days. Discuss the incident with your students. Do they feel the Britons were justified in their anger? Why or why not? What would be your students' reaction if the U.S. government ruled that the day following September 14 would be September 26? What other 11-day periods during the year would students particularly miss? Are there any periods they would eliminate for one year?

September 16: Today is National Play-Doh Day, commemorating the introduction of Play-Doh in 1955.

The following is a simple recipe for a soft clay that can be used over and over again for all sorts of projects. You might let your class do the mixing while you take care of heating the oil and cooking. You might also divide the recipe in half before adding the coloring, and use two different colors.

8 T oil	4 t cream of tartar
4 c flour	4 c water
2 c salt	food coloring

Heat the oil in a pan over medium heat. Mix all other ingredients well and pour into the hot oil. Stir over medium heat until the mixture pulls away from the sides of the pan, forming a ball. Let cool slightly, then knead. Store in plastic containers.

September 19: In 1928, *Steamboat Willie*, the first animated sound cartoon, premiered in New York City. It starred Mickey Mouse.

Prepare a model job-application form and give your children this assignment: You're Mickey Mouse and you're trying to get a job in the movies. What are your qualifications? What about you would appeal to moviegoers? List two references (Donald Duck might be one), and write a few sentences telling what each might say about you.

Have the children conduct a class survey to find out who their favorite cartoon characters are. Based on their survey results, who would they predict to be the entire school's favorite? How many children do they think would name this character as a favorite? Have them check their predictions by polling the school.

September 23: Today is the autumnal equinox, when the sun rises directly in the east at the equator and sets directly in the west, causing a day with equal hours of light and dark.

Beginning on this day in the northern hemisphere, the days will grow shorter and cooler, and the earth will undergo changes—some subtle, some dramatic. To encourage children's awareness of the changes in the natural world, have them keep nature journals. For a few weeks, suggest that they write daily accounts of the things they observe—animals, plants, constellations. Have them keep calendars on which they draw the moon as they see it each night, and on which they record each day's high and low temperatures, as well as the times of sunrise and sunset. (This information is in the newspaper.) When the period of record keeping is over, have them graph the temperatures and the times of sunrise and sunset. Do the graphs help them visualize the changes taking place in autumn?

September 24: This is the day when the world's largest hamburger was exhibited in Australia in 1975. Help your children to comprehend how big a 2,859-pound hamburger is with these activities:

The hamburger's circumference was about 27 feet. With your class, find a way to make a circle this size on the playground.

Figure out how many quarter-pounders could be made from 2,859 pounds of meat. Then figure out how many hamburgers that would be for each child in the class. If the children had one hamburger each for lunch every day, how long would it take them to eat all their hamburgers?

News update: A record-breaking 3,591-pound hamburger (16 feet across) was cooked and devoured last June in Rutland, N.D.

September 25: September is a noteworthy month for newspapers. In 1690, *Publick Occurances, Both Foreign and Domestic*, the first newspaper published in America, made its only appearance. Its publisher's stated intention was to expose people who started false rumors; authorities in Boston suppressed the paper immediately. Almost a century later, in 1784, America's first daily newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Packet and Daily Advertiser* began publication; and 67 years after that, the first copy of *The New York Times* was issued, in 1851.

If you're interested in making newspaper reading a part of your curriculum, here's one way to structure the activity: Divide the class into groups of four and explain that each group will be responsible for finding four different kinds of news stories—one describing a national event, one an event of local significance, one focusing on a person or persons (human interest), and one sports or entertainment item. Each group member then looks for one newspaper story that fits one of the four categories, reads it, and explains it to the other members of the group, being prepared to answer any questions that may arise. Following discussion of the stories, the group members prepare brief written summaries of their stories to be presented to the class.

For younger children, choose easy-to-comprehend news stories to read aloud and discuss. Or have youngsters prepare a "news chart" of daily activities and events in the class, and keep each day's record to provide reading material throughout the year. ■

Sandra Nye is an elementary school teacher in West Babylon, N.Y., and is on the faculty of the Learning Institute.

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Back to school Backpack

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Everything you need for that first week back

A first day checklist

Are you ready for opening day? Double-check with the checklist below.

☐ Your name, class, and room number are posted on your door so parents and students can find the right room easily.

☐ You've made a temporary room arrangement and prepared a seating chart.

☐ There are a couple of extra chairs in the room in case late transfer students show up.

☐ You've got name tags for children.

☐ Your name is on the chalkboard.

☐ Bulletin boards are colorful and welcoming.

☐ You have enough books and supplies for everyone.

☐ If you have an aide or a parent volunteer, there's a place provided for his or her books, personal effects, and so on.

☐ There's a big sign saying "Welcome Back!"

☐ If you're a new teacher, you've read your administrative manual and are familiar with such procedures as attendance rules, fire-safety regulations, nurse services, and cafeteria rules. You know your building—how to locate the exits, principal's office, and so on.

Be a name dropper!

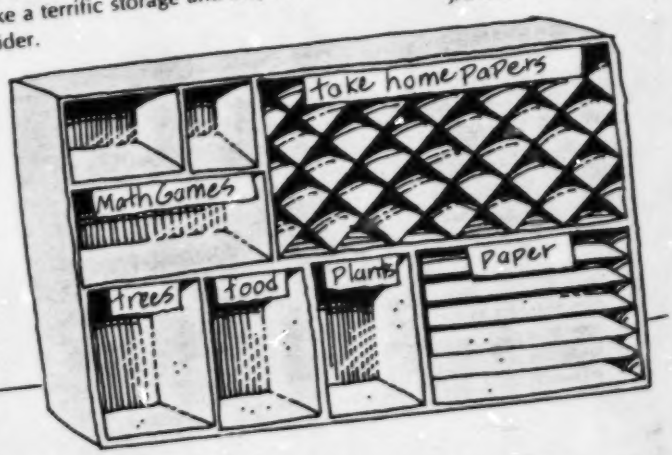
There you are, class list in hand, ready to take attendance for the first time this year. You look down and . . . wouldn't you know it? The first name is *Bjerregaard!* Mispronounce it once maybe, but do it twice, and the child's indignant reaction will be a painful reminder that names mean a lot. With their importance in mind, I "drop" the names of the boys and girls in my classroom into math problems and use them as examples of possessives, compound words, and so on, on language arts worksheets. I also ask my students to alphabetize their classmates' first names, middle names, and last names. Using children's names over and over again in activities helps everyone learn the correct pronunciations and spellings while kids practice important math, language arts, and reading skills.

ANITA C. TWOMEY

Get organized

Avoid wall-to-wall chaos in your classroom with this wall unit you and your students can make. Simply collect boxes of all shapes and sizes. For example, do you know someone who just bought a refrigerator? Ask for the box it came in. Get the box from someone's new TV set, stereo, or dish set. Ask for cartons from supermarkets and liquor stores too. The ones with the cardboard bottle dividers will be especially useful. Save cereal boxes, cigarette cartons, shoe boxes, typing paper boxes, cigar boxes, raisin boxes, spaghetti boxes, and so on. Then take inventory. Decide which small boxes will fit inside the larger ones. (See illustration.) Then paint the boxes. (This takes time, so I asked my students to help.) Finally, glue the boxes together and label the different sections. I used the upper shelves for supplies and teaching aids and the lower shelves for students to display their work. The cardboard bottle dividers made neat slots for students to file take-home work. Our new wall unit can make a terrific storage and display place against a wall or a good room divider.

JAMES MUELLER, JR.



Make friends with your roommates!

What do you do on that first morning when you're confronted with a sea of eager, yet unfamiliar faces? Take a tip from one of these teachers and you'll become acquainted in no time.

Pictures are worth a thousand words I break the ice the first day of school by pulling out the fourth grade's family album—a collection of photographs showing the members of last year's class doing different activities throughout the year. Then I explain to my new students that we, too, are going to start a family album. I ask each child to bring in a favorite photo along with personal facts. The next day we share facts and photos as we paste them into a new album and really get acquainted. We continue to take photos and write captions all that first week and throughout the year. At the end of the year, each child selects a favorite photo to keep as a memory of fourth grade. *MARCIA TROTTER*

The definition of a student We get to know each other by creating a class dictionary. I begin by asking each child to write a three-part definition of himself or herself. It must include a physical description of the child, a description of his or her personality, and a description of a favorite hobby or interest. It must also include a pronunciation key to his or her last name. For example, one student wrote: "Montanaro (MŎN TĂ NÁR Ō) N. 1. A creature with short white legs, flannel plumage on its chest, and a head characterized by a pug nose. 2. May be extremely dangerous if teased. 3. A beast who likes to take things apart." Finally, we compile all the definitions in a book. *JUDITH RIO*

What's the good word? Our first week back I encourage students to make friends and to look for the good qualities in one another with this simple idea. I decorate a shoe box and cut a hole in the top. Then whenever anyone observes a kind or thoughtful deed, he or she writes it down on a piece of paper and drops it in the box. Only positive notes about good deeds are allowed. On Friday, I open the box and read the notes aloud. The good words are appreciated by all. *REBECCA GRAVES*

Savvy classroom systems

Use these management tips to keep your class running smoothly.

Jobs are a chore no more! Choosing children for classroom jobs doesn't have to be a chore when you use the Job Jar. I ask each child in my class to write his or her name on a card, fold it once, and drop it in a gallon glass jar. When a job comes up, such as running the film projector or carrying a message to the office, I just reach in the jar and pull out a name. The child has the right to refuse the task; if that happens, the name goes back in the jar. If the child accepts, I put his or her card aside until all students have had a chance to help out. *CAROL WELSCH*

The perfect all-purpose pass system Last year, classroom interruptions were getting me down. I'd be about to make a brilliant point when one child would say, "I have to go to the bathroom." But no more. The last quarter of school I devised colorful charts showing each student's name: one for the bathroom, one for the library, and one for the reading specialist. I give each child a clothespin with his or her name on it, and when he or she needs to leave the room, for whatever reason, he or she clips the pin next to his or her name on the appropriate chart. That way, I could tell at a glance who was gone and where. *KAREN GANGLOFF*

Take some kids sitting on the floor, add paper and paste, throw in some good talk, and a pinch of good humor, and you can cook up clever craft projects your kids will eat up! These teachers started their projects the first week back. Their classes made pillows, tables, and take-home totes while they got to know each other. The results were not only cozier classrooms, but also warmer feelings toward one another.

Pillow talk My students loved making classroom pillows our first week back to use at their desks, in our book nook, and at rest time. First, they cut out large squares of felt or other material. Then they pinned the edges of two squares together and sewed around three and a half sides. Next, they turned the pillow inside out and inserted the stuffing through the opening. After that, they pinned the opening and stitched it shut. Finally, they decorated their pillows with permanent markers. *NICKI KLEIN*

Minicenters Need child-sized tables for classroom games? My kids and I made them from large (25") cardboard boxes. It's simple. Just cut the flaps off the top of a box; then turn it upside down so the bottom of the box becomes the top of your table. Cut or have older children cut large semicircles in all four sides to accommodate little knees. Your kids can reinforce the top and sides with wide masking tape and cover the entire table with attractive adhesive-backed paper. *FLORENCE RIVES*

Take-home totes Make sure papers and notes to parents get home safely by sending them in colorful tote bags children treasure. My class made them from wallpaper samples. For each tote, we simply cut a large piece of wallpaper from an old wallpaper book and wrapped it around a box, the way you would wrap a gift package except we left one end open. (Hint: Don't tape the paper together; glue it for extra sturdiness.) Then we removed the box, attached heavy yarn or string handles to the open end, and presto! A tote bag any child would be proud of! *JOAN MARY MACEY*

Backpack

Get to know your school

Your students may know that the principal runs the school, but do they know that she also jogs in local marathons? Do they realize that the school cook can whip up a painting as well as a pie? Help kids get to know your school's staff and you'll be delighted with the new friendships that result!

Very important persons Introduce your students to the VIPs in your school—the principal, other teachers, bus drivers, media specialist, school nurse, and so on—by creating a Who's Who corner in your classroom in which you display photos, personal mementos, and fact sheets about each person. I did this by taking snapshots of each VIP and asking him or her to bring small items that illustrate his or her responsibilities at school and hobbies at home. This way, my students not only learn who's who, but also who does what on the job and in their spare time. As a result, one student found that our school nurse shared his interest in fishing, and a friendship formed in no time. *MABEL COUCH*

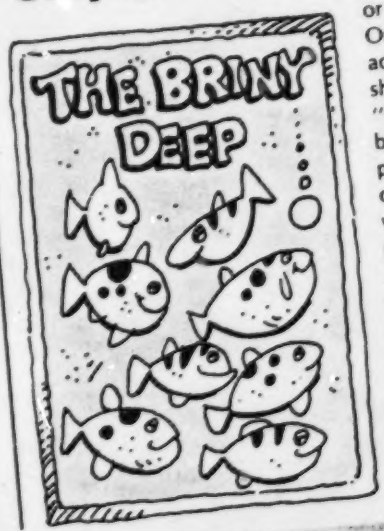
Your best foot forward One of the best ways to help kids make friends in school is to have them do something nice for their school. Our first graders made a colorful wall display of butterflies to brighten up the cafeteria.

To make the butterflies, we asked each child to take off his or her shoes and socks and stand with feet together on brightly colored pieces of paper while we traced around both feet. Then each child cut out the tracing without cutting the separate feet apart and decorated it with felt-tip pens and glitter to make it resemble a butterfly. We posted them in the cafeteria to the delight of the older students and staff who tried to match each pair of feet with its owner. The display was accompanied by the following poem:

The first grade made some butterflies
To watch you while you eat.
Now we'll tell our big surprise.
They're really just our feet!

LAURA DANSBY
SANDRA JONES

Fill odd minutes and empty walls!



During the first few days back there are bound to be odd moments when a child says, "I've finished my work. Now what do I do?" I say, "Go fish!" The child goes to the bulletin board, which is about the Briny Deep. (See illustration.) He or she picks a paper fish off the display. On the back the child will find a surprise activity such as "Find five facts about sharks and write a story using them" or "Read a book about barnacles to a new buddy!" or "Paint a picture of a purple porpoise!" Some activities even encourage children to make a new fish, write a new activity on the back, and pin it to the board. You can use this idea year round, adapting it to fit the seasons, special holidays, or class study units. For example, instead of the fish used in the study of the ocean, use stars in an astronomy unit, snowflakes in the middle of winter, or hearts on Valentine's Day. The possibilities are endless—just as those extra minutes can be when you have nothing planned! *JULIANNE FITZ*

Files at your fingertips

If you've taught for several years, no doubt you find yourself inundated with teaching ideas and materials. But where are they when you need them? Gain easy access to them with the organizational tips below.

A place for all those clip-and-saves What do you do with all those great teaching ideas you clip out of education journals? I used to clip and lose my clip-and-saves until there was a sale on jumbo photo albums in my local dime store. I bought five, one for each subject area I teach. Now every month or so, I go through old magazines, clip items that interest me, and slip them under the plastic adhesive pages in the appropriate album. These plastic covers protect the ideas for years, and access couldn't be easier. *CAROLYN ROBERTS*

File by color To organize bulkier items such as posters, music, art projects, and teaching aids, file by color! Invest in brightly colored file folders and use one color for each subject. For example, I use yellow folders for language arts, red ones for math, green ones for science, and so on. Within each color section, individual folders hold ideas and games that teach a particular skill within that subject area. For example, one yellow folder holds spelling games, another holds vowel flash cards, and so on.

I even have a section of blue folders that divide ideas by the month. For example, at the beginning of the school year, I pull out my blue September folder full of fun sheets, puzzles, old INSTRUCTOR calendars, books, poems, and stories—all geared around September events and holidays.

I store all my folders in an inexpensive filing cabinet in my classroom, but a large box will do. With these files at my fingertips, I feel confident and ready to teach almost anything at a minute's notice.

EVELYN SCURRY

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Making Those First Days Count

Three ways to help that roomful of strangers become friends

by Rhoda Kahn Soloway

Darting into the new classroom on the first day of school, a child hurriedly slinks into a seat and glances around. "Is there anyone I know?" the newcomer thinks. "What will the class be like? Will the kids be friendly? Well, anyway, it's a new year, a new chance. But right now, we're not getting anywhere at making friends—all those forms to fill out, all the explanations, all those adults constantly talking at us, even in gym!"

Those first few days can be anxious ones for children. Of course, they're not too easy for you, either, with all the administrative chores—making out schedules, testing, grouping—as well as all the new faces. To melt the tension, some icebreakers are in order. Three activities I use with my sixth graders help us all start the year on the right foot. The children learn to recognize names and faces, discover intriguing "statistics" about each other and work together on a bulletin board with their own talents and abilities as the theme. None of these projects requires much time or planning and they can be easily handled by most students. Best of all, we learn about each other as people, a good way to establish our new relationships in the beginning of the year.

Scrambled Names

It would be ideal if every child could quickly make friends with every other child in a new classroom. But since time is short, and since some students might be overwhelmed by such a prospect, I get my students started by being sure they meet and get to know *one* particular person. To do this, I use a scrambled name game with a twist.

Before the first day of school, I print each child's first and last names on a piece of oaktag. On the reverse side of each card I make a dot with a felt-tip pen on the back of each letter of the last name only. I cut apart the letters of each name, jumble them into an envelope and mark it with a "G" for girl or "B" for boy. For my own information I also slip in a small piece of paper with the full name written on it. This ensures that I do not give any child his or her own name to unscramble and that I can quickly remove the envelopes of children who don't actually wind up in my class.

After I introduce myself on the first day I surreptitiously remove the slips of paper with the names and hand one envelope to each child—"B" to boys and "G" to girls. This division by sex seems to work better with sixth graders, but the envelopes could be randomly distributed.

At my signal to start, each child empties his or her envelope, unscrambles the name and then finds his or her mystery classmate. Using his or her own questions, the finder interviews the "findee" and has to learn at least five interesting facts which he or she will use to introduce the child to the rest of us. To avoid too much confusion, I wander around the room, listen to the conversations and ask the children to wait their turns.

As the children finish, after 20 minutes or so, depending on the group, each one checks in with me and puts his or her unscrambled name on the board. The order of this list determines when each child will introduce a classmate and will be introduced.

Here is an example of what the children and I think would be a good introduction: "This is Liz Connors. Her real name is Helen Elizabeth but she likes to be called 'Liz.' Her family has five kids and two dogs and a cat. She lives on Knob Hill Road, takes Bus 23 and the only one she knows in this class is Terry, over there. She likes tennis, and in gym she's good at volleyball. She plays the flute."

By the way, you might consider taping all the introductions. Students will enjoy hearing them on the last day of school.

If anyone has trouble puzzling out a particularly difficult name, I suggest turning the letters over and sorting the dotted and blank pieces into two piles. This usually provides sufficient help. The children quickly realize the two piles represent the first and last names. In addition, they have probably already heard classmates' names once or twice, such as during roll call.

If you work with younger children and they are all strangers to each other, you could post a class list for the students to refer to. However, I think that unraveling the name is not as important as meeting the classmate.

As each child introduces another, I listen for and note particularly good ques-

continued

Illustrated by Margaret Fleming

tions. Later, the children and I discuss the questions and the kinds of things they feel are interesting to know about another person. We compose a list of five or six questions and during the year various students use these as guides to introduce new students to the rest of us. For example, some of our questions are "What do you like to do best?" "If you have a favorite sport, what is it?" "What is your family like?" Another possibility is to develop and pose questions to adults in school—me, another teacher, the nurse, classroom aides and others.

How We Are Different and Alike

Once the children have been introduced to each other, they are ready for the next step—finding out what they all have in common and what sets them apart as individuals. So, some time within the next few days we play "Know Your Classmate," a simple exercise done with a set of mimeographed questions for which the students must find the answers. Before we start I give each child a set of questions and go over the directions aloud. I explain that to get the answers to the questions all the children must walk around the room talking to everyone. I set a time limit of about 20 minutes, but this could be longer if you work with younger children or you see that the kids are establishing a real rapport. I also emphasize that being accurate is more important than being quick. Following is the questionnaire we use. (When reproducing the questions, be sure to provide a typed line for each part of a question.)

"Let's find the champion 'know-siest' classmate. Go around the class to find the answers to the questions below. Write the person's name and the answer he or she gives. There may be more than one person whose answers will fit a question. That's all right, but you need just one. You can do the questions in any order but keep the answers to yourself because we're looking for the champ.

1. Who was born farthest away from our town? Where? (Before we begin I pull the wall maps down to aid accuracy.)
2. Who is a native of our town?
3. Who comes from the largest family? How many children?
4. Who is an only child?
5. Who has lived outside the United States? Where?
6. Who has attended the most schools outside of our town? How many?
7. Who has won an award in anything? For what? Where?
8. Who plays a stringed, wind or percussion instrument? What is it?
9. Who has never had any cavities?
10. Who plays the piano?
11. Who has the most pets? How many?
12. Who can speak fluently a language other than English? What is it?
13. Who has flown in a 747 jet? Where to or from?
14. Who has or has had a paying job outside his or her family? What is or was it?"

During the next noisy 20 minutes or so exciting kinships are unearthed. Discovering that someone else was born in Fargo, North Dakota, raises chickens or has five brothers produces a warm camaraderie. Finding out our unique differences is another high point of this game. The children are invariably amused, impressed or intrigued by their classmates' novel experiences.

When everyone finishes the questionnaire, we go over the results, each child checking his or her own paper. We establish all the possible right answers, then determine who is the best detective.

"Average" Kids

Offshoots of this activity can be as varied as the game itself, depending on the time you want to allot and the children's interest and maturity. For example, children who are not native to your state can point out their birthplaces on the wall map. After discussing Question 4 about the only child, ask for a show of hands on which students are the oldest and youngest in their families. This, in turn, can lead to finding the percentages of oldest and youngest children in the class and the average number of children per family. To extend this idea even further, students can gather similar data from other classes and figure out the size of the average family in their community or town. In my class, the children develop a composite of the "typical" sixth grader in our school by using this information and other facts, such as the average number of pets, the average number of moves a family has made and so on.

Later on during the year, especially when that important first piece of writing is assigned, I encourage the children to expand on the questions we have discussed. Some of the topics they've chosen are: "I Like/Hate Being an Only Child." "Being the Oldest/Youngest Is No Fun." "My First Airplane Flight Was Scary." "Siamese Cats Think They're People." "Playing the Tuba Can Be a Problem." "Moving from Place to Place Is Sort of Confusing." "Fish Do Have Personalities." Usually every child has some real response to at least one of the personal areas we touch on, even if it is only "How I Hate to Go to the Dentist!"

Kids can, by their choices of action, make or break the class. To help them understand their roles in developing class spirit and classroom ambience and to appreciate their own and others' talents and skills, I use a "Kids Can" bulletin board theme in September. The focus of the display is a large circular logo consisting of a sneaker with untied laces and "Kids Can" in large letters above it. A cartoon-type cluster of children or any other eye-catching, child-oriented design could serve as the center of attention.

Scattered over the board are 26 verbs from *a* to *z* which show children's power to do—words that we can later use to talk about attitudes and feelings they have about themselves and others. Most are positive but a few, to be realistic, are negative. Here is one list I have used: *accomplish, blame, cogitate, determine, explore, fulfill, grumble, help, inspire, josh, kindle, lead, mobilize, negate, obfuscate, plan, question, respond, succeed, teach, unite, vegetate, wonder, x-out, yield* and *zero-in.* I purposely throw in such verbs as *cogitate, mobilize, negate* and *obfuscate* in order to pique their curiosity and add to their vocabulary.

Each day we discuss about five or six of the words and their implications for individuals and for the class. These short talks draw us all together as a group and help the children realize their individual importance in creating class chemistry.

For example, a discussion of the word *accomplish* could focus on three things each child might look forward to achieving during the year and how he or she thinks the teacher, the class and he or she can achieve these goals.

A discussion of *negate* might lead to the understanding that all the best-laid teacher plans may be spoiled by class members who are bent on obstructing rather than helping.

A discussion of *josh* might reflect on our ability to take a joke without anger—child and teacher alike.

After the children learn to spell and define the words, they put them into written sentences or convey their meanings through illustrations. Each child writes his or her best sentence on a strip of construction paper with the key word underlined or selects the best drawing to pin to the board.

With these devices, I find that the first several days of school take on a sparkle, a warmth captured in one-to-one conversation, a proffer of friendship. After all, if two of you both love salami and pickle sandwiches, were born in California and are only children, you've found a way to begin.

Rhoda Kahn Soloway teaches at Cider Mill School in Wilton, Conn.

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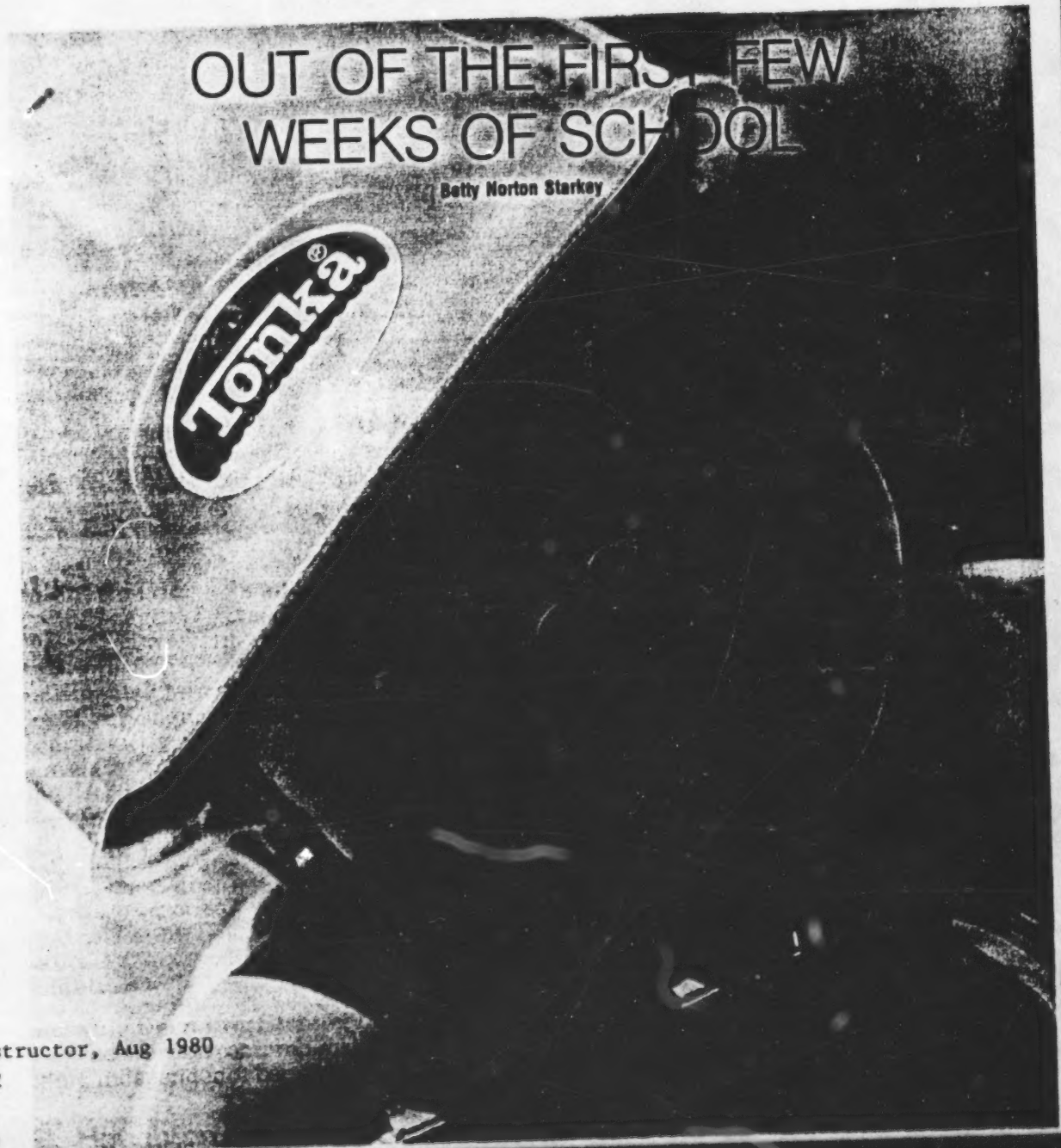
Primary teachers

GET MORE MILEAGE



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The first few weeks of school are more difficult for preschool and primary teachers than for teachers of any other grade. It can take days before children settle down to the point where crying spells are not a once-an-hour occurrence. And it can take weeks before you feel you are accomplishing something. There's not much you can do to prepare for the crying jags, but there are a 100 tiny details that can be worked out now to make the year more productive from the start. For example, think about the arrangement of your room. Are there ways you can change it to better suit your needs? Do you have rules determined for the year? How will you handle birthdays? And how will you work with parents? Organizing yourself now can help ease the chaos once school begins.

Start by concentrating your efforts on three organizational elements—classroom environment, management, and teaching plans. You can use the checklist to help you do this. It divides these elements into more specific areas of planning. Add other areas that you can organize now, and delete those on the list that do not apply to you. Make it your goal to check every box before the first day of school!

Below is a closer examination of some of the elements on the check list.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Room arrangement

Whether your classroom is brand new to you, or one you have had for years, take time to evaluate your resources. Determine whether you have space for all the activities you consider important. Is there an area for quiet reading or looking at picture books? A science corner? A place for the whole class to gather? Think back to trouble spots in your room last year. What activities were unsuccessful because of their location? Once you have singled out the problems in the arrangement of your room, draw several rough floor plans designed to resolve them. Then actually rearrange your room according to a few of your roughs. Choose the one you feel most comfortable with and which will work best with your daily schedule.

Bulletin boards

Bulletin boards add color and interest to a classroom, but they also require their share of work. Save time later by cutting extra borders and letters now from several colors of construction paper. Store in bags for instant use.

And, introduce your pupils to activities they will enjoy this year through a bulletin board entitled "School Is a Learning Place." Include snapshots of your class at

continued

Your August Organizer

Item	Specific Things to Do
CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT	
☐ Room Arrangement	Decide what instructional needs you have and how your room arrangement should meet them. Draw some rough floor plans and try several arrangements.
☐ Bulletin Boards	Prepare extra borders and letters for future bulletin boards. Decide upon a theme for your September bulletin boards.
CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT	
☐ Schedule	List all the essential subjects you must cover, and list others you want to fit in. Arrange into time blocks, and compare schedule with room arrangement.
☐ Rules	Jot down discipline problems you encountered last year and how you will handle them this year. Decide upon an attention getter and acquire the device, if necessary.
☐ Birthdays	Determine the procedure you will use for treating birthdays. Make birthday crowns and cards. Make the little paper cakes for pasting on the birthday calendar.
☐ Activity System	Decide on five activity centers for unstructured time, being sure you can supply the needed materials. Make a table flow-chart.
☐ Carryall Bags	Buy the material for the bags and make a tissue-paper pattern. Sew the bags, and label with adhesive tape. Prepare the note to accompany the bags.
☐ Notes to Parents	Make a list of the notes you will need to send home to parents. Print the notes on spirit masters and duplicate. File notes under the proper heading for easy retrieval.
☐ Orientation Meeting for Parents	Plan to meet with parents before the first day of school. Choose a date for the meeting. Inform parents by letter or by phone. Plan the agenda and gather together all materials you will need to present.
TEACHING PLANS	
☐ The First Day	Plan the schedule for the first day. Make a list of all materials you will need, and some for emergencies. Gather together all the books, songs, art materials, and so on.
☐ The First Week	Decide how you will build upon the first day's schedule. Make a list of all additional materials you will need. Gather materials together and label for the specific day they will be introduced.
☐ New Teaching Technique	Think of something new to try this year that you know you would enjoy. Plan carefully how it can be accomplished. Then do it!

work from the previous year. Highlight special activities such as field trips, visitors, holiday parties, science projects, and so on.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Daily schedule

How is your teaching day going to be organized? Which activity will follow which? You will feel more at ease when unexpected problems arise if each day is firmly arranged in your mind. When deciding upon a schedule, keep in mind that four- to seven-year-olds are at a restless age. It is best to alternate seated work sessions with brief periods of physical activity. Also allow extra time for putting on and taking off coats and other outer wear, and for changing from one activity to another. If you don't, you will always find yourself running behind.

Rules

Classroom rules must be determined before the first day of school. You cannot wait until problems arise to decide how to handle them. Write down the types of discipline problems you have encountered in the past and how you have corrected student behavior. Evaluate your approaches to see if some different techniques might be more successful this year and devise this year's rules accordingly. Once you have discussed your classroom rules with the children, be consistent in enforcing them! Don't let a first offense go by—it will more than likely be followed by a second. Finally, acquire an "attention getter" to help reestablish order when the noise level gets out of hand. Try a bell, hitting a few keys on the piano, saying a special word. Or hold up a picture of a butterfly, flower, caterpillar, or anything else that does not make noise and ask everyone to make a sound like the picture (silence). Then tell them to make it louder (absolute silence). Any of these attention getters will work, especially if you make the introduction of the device exciting and spend as much time as needed to get absolute silence every time you use it.

Birthdays

Birthdays are very special days for this age group. And nothing could be worse than to discover you have a birthday the second day of school and nothing ready for a celebration. Save both frustration and tears by keeping a classroom calendar especially for birthdays. On each child's birth date, attach a paper cake with his or her name on it. Also prepare a special birthday card for each child from you and make several cardboard crowns (with four, five, six, or the appropriate number of candles on the rim).

Then plan a procedure to follow for birthdays, and carry it out the same way every time. For example, have the child come forward to receive your card and the crown while you and the rest of the class recite this poem: Today is a very special one;/It's time for (child's name) to have some fun./Come up, (child's name), so we can say/Happy Birthday to you today./Tell us, tell us, all around/How many candles on your crown?

Activity time

Base unstructured time around five tables, each of which offers a different activity. Dividing the class into five small groups will make this part of your day easier to supervise. Prepare a large chart listing the names of all your children. Beside the names paste pictures representing each activity table and the order in which each child will visit them during the week. Designate one table to be "table of the day." This group will go first for show-and-tell and snack time, and share other special privileges.

"Organizing yourself now can help ease the chaos once school begins."

Carryall bags

Very young children often have a difficult time getting notes, milk money, and other materials back and forth to school safely. Solve this problem by giving each child a sturdy bag. Use a strong material like denim, cut to pieces measuring 9" × 12". Stitch sides together and sew on a handle made from folded scraps of material. Label each child's name on a bag with adhesive tape. Attach a note to the bag on the first day of school informing parents of its purpose and encouraging them to help their child keep the bag from being lost. Collect the bags at the end of the year and reuse by peeling off the adhesive tape and relabeling for next year's class.

Working with parents

Prepare standard notes to send to parents by writing on a spirit master and duplicating so they are ready to hand out at anytime. Some suggested topics are procedures on discipline, show-and-tell, snacks, the carryall bags, milk money, lunch money, and so on.

If you are interested in involving parents in any way during the year, this is also the time to start thinking about how. Jan Hicks of Spokane, Washington, has a program she calls "The Parent's Day Program." Before the year begins, she writes each parent asking them if they have a talent or interest they would like to share with the class. Enthusiastic responses have ranged from conducting "pizza factories" to teaching children how to silk screen to simply telling a story. On the note that is sent home Hicks includes space for a brief description of the project and for listing any audiovisual equipment or other materials which will be needed. Hicks reports parents enjoy the opportunity to share their interests—much to the delight of their proud offspring!

Meeting parents prior to the first day of school is also a good way to avoid problems later. And a parent who is aware of what will be happening during the year can be invaluable in helping a child adjust during the first weeks of school. Plan an evening get-together in your home or in an informal setting at the school. Present the curriculum to be followed during the year, and pass out sample work sheets for parents to study. Inform them of classroom policies, and of any materials students may need such as a paint shirt, blanket, and so on. Allow time for socializing so parents can get to know each other. This can pay off in the future when you need a volunteer committee to chaperon a field trip or sew costumes for a class presentation.

TEACHING PLANS

The first day

You think about this day for a good part of the summer, half in eager anticipation, half in dread. It is such an important day; yet when working with preschool and primary children, there are so many things that can go wrong. A crying child, unexpected registrations—one of whom is already looking for the nearest exit—can all spell chaos for even the most composed of teachers. But by *over*planning and making sure you have every item you will need at your fingertips, you can avoid many anxious moments.

Begin by writing down in detail how every minute of your day will be spent. You will have to be flexible to allow for those five-minute crying jags, but make sure you know in which order activities will proceed throughout the day. Determine all the materials you will need, and

continued

those which will aid in an emergency. Here is a sample schedule for the first day of school. Write yours in the same manner, and review it several times before school begins.

Sit in chairs arranged in a circle.

Pin a name tag on each child.

Collect lunch money and take roll.

Teach a poem. Here is an easy one which can be related to an art activity: Here is a ball for bouncing,/My, it's oh, so big./Here's a shovel for playing,/Now just watch me dig./Here's a kite for flying/High up in the sky./And here are hands for folding/While I sit quietly by.

Sing a familiar song.

Discuss the "magic bell" or the attention getter you will be using.

March in a circle to a record.

Explain and do an art activity. A good one for the first day is for children to paste precut shapes onto colored paper. It's not too messy, and each one will turn out beautifully.

Play outside after discussing the rules.

Conduct an activity time after discussing the rules.

Clean up from activities.

Read a story to the group.

Review poems and songs that were learned today.

Have one child tell what was done today.

Get coats and paper together to go home.

Tell children about something exciting they will do tomorrow.

Use this pattern for the entire week, emphasizing rules and classroom procedures. Add a new song each day, a new poem the third day. If rules are forgotten, remind the offenders and help them think through their actions. You can make the rest of the year more pleasant by solving problems now.

Art activities for the week could include: On the second day, having kids draw a picture of themselves at school; on the third, coloring a large circle and pasting it on a piece of paper to illustrate the "Here is a ball for bouncing..." poem (Encourage more mature children to also add the kite and shovel.); on the fourth day, trying the shape-pasting activity again; and drawing Humpty Dumpty or another nursery-rhyme character to take home on the fifth.

Try a new technique

The first few weeks of school are the most difficult. Give yourself something to look forward to by trying a new teaching technique or classroom activity. It can be anything from setting up a science center with live animals to teaching math in learning centers instead of to the whole class. The important point is that it should be new to you personally. It will not only keep your program viable, it will keep you fresh and alert as well.

Teacher's journal

Keep a running journal all year. List the songs and stories that were most effective with your children, the art projects which met with success and the flops you don't want to repeat. Devote a special section to problems that cropped up during the year and ways you solved them, or should have solved them. Keep your journal handy on your desk so you can note events as they happen during the day. The journal will be an invaluable aid when planning next August for the new school year.

You *can* make those first few weeks of school productive if you follow this blueprint for organizing yourself. Soak up some more sun, play another set of tennis, and enjoy those remaining barbecues. But in between time, start getting ready for the new school year. August will still be as pleasurable, but September will be even more so. □

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Getting acquainted on the first day

June S. Woods

FIRST-DAY IMPRESSIONS LAST. What you do sets the stage for the rest of the year. The "stage" I like to set for new students is relaxed, open, and accepting. I believe that tense, anxious students find it difficult to be enthusiastic about learning, and joy in learning is one of the attitudes I'm aiming for.

To aid in creating these conditions, we do a few things the first day of school that I've found work well in the intermediate grades. When the children come in they find a circle of chairs awaiting them in the center of the room. Desks are back against the walls.

Once everyone is seated I take roll, asking each child what he wants to be called. Imagination reigns as we make name tags to be worn that day. The creatively designed tags add to the fun of learning names quickly. I bet students I can learn all their names before dismissal, having some tokens ready to give to those whose names I miss so they won't feel less important than the others.

Once we finish with name tags, I pass out a fun questionnaire listing such items as: Find the tallest person, the person with the most freckles, the person with the widest belt, the person with the longest hair, the person who is oldest, youngest, and so on. Children are free to move around the room and talk to each other to find the person who best fits each description. Our name tags solve the problem of spelling and unknown words are quickly picked up by observing each other and by asking for help.

Once they've quizzed each other and found answers, I lead them into an informal discussion about the results. What's merely an amusing game for them is an important strategy for me—it proves relaxed and purposeful interaction, a way to exchange information, and a basis for our first discussion. This is important because a free exchange of ideas will play a vital part in our classroom learning during the year.

Next we play "Interview." Students pair off with one member interviewing the other. The interviewer must gather facts about the other, for the purpose of making an introduction to the class, by asking questions about family pets, hobbies, favorite foods, TV shows, and so on. After a short time the paired children switch roles. When the second interview is finished, introductions are made to the entire class. Probably because they are telling about someone else instead of themselves, pupils are seldom too shy to participate in this activity.

By this time everyone is getting eager for a desk so we move the desks into place. Once they're settled, I pass each child a sealed envelope containing personally addressed letters (handwritten, but duplicated on a spirit master). The letter welcomes the student to my class and explains some of the things we'll be doing throughout the year. The children are asked to write a return letter telling me what they would like to learn during the year, their likes and dislikes in subject areas, and their feelings about school. Not only do I receive an astonishing amount of information—their letters tell me much about their spelling and writing skills!

After an active summer, it's hard to sit in a classroom all day, so in the afternoon we take a hike in nearby fields where we pick leaves and wild flowers. Upon return to the classroom, I supplement their gatherings with pieces of charcoal and decayed soft brown wood. Using only these natural materials for color, we make drawings, and then arrange them on a wall display.

No fields near your school? Walk around a few city blocks on an "alphabet hike," spotting objects that begin with each letter of the alphabet. Use these objects to make an alphabet mural of your neighborhood. Whatever the object of your walk, you'll find that the resulting class-made display really gives the children a sense of belonging and being part of their new classroom from the beginning.

Sandwiched between these activities are the necessary opening-day chores. Before we know it, the dismissal bell rings, though not before we've done the name recall bit.

It has taken several years to test and try various ideas that make those first-day impressions happy and lasting. Sharing them with you may help you and your students end that first day getting to know each other and feel comfortable in your new surroundings. If you're lucky, you may get a first-day letter like this one:

Dear Mrs. Woods
Your the nicesd techer ive had so fare. I wish I had you in every other grade even high school and colage.
Your pupoll,
Denny Hunter

Wow! It's going to be a good year. □

Back-to-school shopping list

Frances Bush

- ✓ 1 box facial tissue
- ✓ 2 spools thread (black and white), 1 package needles in assorted sizes
- ✓ 1 package safety pins, assorted sizes
- ✓ 1 roll paper towels
- ✓ 2 packages file cards (3" x 5" and 4" x 6")
- ✓ 1 staple puller
- ✓ 1 package letter-size envelopes
- ✓ 1 dozen stamped post cards
- ✓ 1 box rubber bands
- ✓ 1 package plastic bags
- ✓ 1 fingernail file
- ✓ 1 roll clear self-adhesive paper
- ✓ 1 box children's birthday cards
- ✓ 1 clipboard
- ✓ 1 whistle
- ✓ 1 pitch pipe
- ✓ 1 bud vase
- ✓ 1 package paper cups
- ✓ 1 plastic jar of hand cream
- ✓ 1 pocketknife with leather punch attachment and can opener
- ✓ 1 carton breath mints, assorted flavors
- ✓ 1 electric cord adapter
- ✓ 1 divider tray for desk drawer
- ✓ 1 jar petroleum jelly
- ✓ 1 jar instant coffee
- ✓ 1 box assorted flavors instant soup
- ✓ 1 cup
- ✓ 1 heating coil
- ✓ 1 box poker chips

10 new school year resolutions

Joan Foster

1. Always go to school calm and rested. Get a good night's rest. Your enthusiasm depends on it—class enthusiasm will always reflect yours.

2. Go to school early to put work on the board and review your plans for the day. Have needed materials at hand. Sharpen extra pencils.

3. Greet your pupils with a smile, by their names. Give a child lacking confidence extra attention from the very first day.

4. Consider fellow teachers as teammates within a profession. ready to share ideas and lend support whenever appropriate.

5. Look to the principal for guidance, suggestions, and help whenever you need it. That's really their job.

6. Establish with the class a sense of pride in their room and involve their help in making class bulletin boards.

7. Encourage reading through example. Read aloud ten minutes or so to the class on a daily basis. Reading is contagious. A good story is fun to hear.

8. Take your class to assemblies and special classes promptly and be back at the room two minutes before a special class ends. The special class teacher has a very close schedule.

9. Look on faculty committee meetings as a team effort. You are neither a coach nor a spectator. Team effort is necessary for success and progress.

10. Review the day mentally as you wind your way home. Take joy over the successes and hope that the frustrations and temporary failures will not be repeated.

Teaching is one of the most rewarding careers in our society. Be proud of your class, proud of your school, and take pride in your profession. Your role in the unfolding of the learning process will enable children to lead more worthwhile lives and can enrich the lives of your fellow teachers. Make each day the best possible day that you can. □